



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

Edinburgh Research Explorer

Deleuze's Theory of the Other – A Serial Solipsism in Three moments

Citation for published version:

Wiszniewski, D 2009, Deleuze's Theory of the Other – A Serial Solipsism in Three moments. in *Serial(ity) ... & ..., Symposium*. University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh.

Link:

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

Document Version:

Peer reviewed version

Published In:

Serial(ity) ... & ..., Symposium

Publisher Rights Statement:

© Wiszniewski, D. (2009). Deleuze's Theory of the Other – A Serial Solipsism in Three moments. In *Serial(ity) ... & ..., Symposium*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh, University of Edinburgh.

General rights

Copyright for the publications made accessible via the Edinburgh Research Explorer is retained by the author(s) and / or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing these publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

Take down policy

The University of Edinburgh has made every reasonable effort to ensure that Edinburgh Research Explorer content complies with UK legislation. If you believe that the public display of this file breaches copyright please contact openaccess@ed.ac.uk providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.



Walter Benjamin poses the following question: “Whether the relationship of the storyteller to his material, human life, is not in itself a craftsman’s relationship, whether it is not his very task to fashion the raw material of experience, his own and that of others, in a solid, useful, and unique way.”¹

DELEUZE’S THEORY OF THE OTHER – a serial solipsism in three moments

Michel Tournier recasts the story of Robinson Crusoe as a man who exists in a place in the absence of Others.² In Deleuze’s essay of Tournier’s book,³ Deleuze uses the “effects” on Robinson of being without others to begin a theorisation on what the Other is.⁴ The Other for Deleuze begins then as anyone other than the subject (although the story and Deleuze’s analysis centres on Robinson’s experiences, Deleuze casts Robinson as example of any subject). The Others who are absent from Robinson’s island are the ones through and with whom Robinson would normally engage with the world; they may have provided an understanding of this new island world. In the absence of anyone else, Robinson’s recourse is to an elemental existence: Robinson no longer co-exists with others; existence is only he and the world in its raw condition. In the absence of others, Robinson is forced to come to terms with the island without the trappings of the others of his normal world. Furthermore, until Friday appears there is no trace of others even of this new world of the island to offer guidance. Initially, for Robinson, the island was scary. However, it was the reading of the place using the terms of reference from his life before the shipwreck (of the others who were now absent) that gave him most of the unease. Once he had reached an elemental concordat with the place he saw it as wonderful, began to learn its ways and construct the world of the island for himself. However, in this gradual shift towards otherness, the appearance of Friday temporarily set the world at odds again.

Deleuze theorizes Robinson’s experiences on the island as three moments of the Other. He calls upon Lacanian categories that were being developed contemporaneously: *loss*, *repetition*, *forclusion*, *structure*, *displacement*, *doubles*, and *desubjectivation*. Tournier’s version of

¹ Benjamin, Walter, The Storyteller, in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, Fontana Press, London, (1973) 1992, p.107

² Tournier, Michel, *Vendredi ou les limbes du Pacifique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1967). English translation, *Friday*, trans. Norman Denny (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985, by arrangement with Doubleday).

³ Deleuze, Gilles, Michel Tournier And The World Without Others, in *The Logic of Sense*, London: The Athlone Press, 1990, pp.301-321. First published as “A Theory of The Other,” in *Critique*, 1967; 5.

⁴ Ibid.304.

Robinson's movement towards "great Health" is cast by Deleuze as an example of progressive perversion – but perversion in a typical Deleuzian (liberated/promiscuous) sense: "perversion is a bastard concept," for Deleuze, "half juridical, half medical. But neither medicine nor law are entirely suited to it."⁵ After first suffering the loss of others Robinson leaves behind the structures of the old world. The Others of the old world defined the world's perceptual field, but the new world comes to light not through the structure of the old but through a first perversion by the subject: in the new context the repetition of perceptual judgement continues, but without recognisable reference becomes a recourse to the very processes of structuring. As Deleuze puts it, "It is not the ego but the Other as structure which renders perception possible."⁶ In the absence of others the real other becomes more comprehensible. The Other then for Deleuze can be defined as "an expression of a possible world." There is a genesis of world at the point when the "forclusion" of the old world is opened by the absence of Others, or more appropriately the terms of forclusion carried by the collective ego-ideal of others, and new terms for reasoning are found in their place. In this productive sense, escaping all foreclosures of the techno-economic world, Other is "tribunal of all reality."⁷ [At this point we can see why design theorists call upon Deleuze: he gives substance and respectability to perverse creative processes.]

The second moment of the Other arises when the things of the old world that Robinson attempts to mimic in order to provide some structure to his new existence begin to crumble: his habitual practices, the titles he awards himself (master, governor, king of the island) the things he makes like goatskin clothes, parasol and the water clock, ultimately become doubles, merely simulacra of the old world. Such doubling just seems to describe his existence as an alien, displaced and impoverished version of the old world. Robinson's regression at this moment is primordial. He reaches back to the Earth-Mother. He stops his water clock. He runs about in the black timelessness of night and the same abyss in the light timelessness of day. He lathers himself in goats' milk. He goes a little mad. He becomes a pervert – but of course not really. "Robinson does nothing perverse, properly speaking."⁸ He gives himself up to the elemental forces of the

⁵ Ibid. "The fundamental misinterpretation of perversion, based on a hasty phenomenology of perverse behaviour and on certain legal exigencies, consists in bringing perversion to bear upon certain offenses committed against Others." Ibid. 320.

⁶ Ibid. 309

⁷ Ibid. 311.

⁸ Ibid. 303.

island. The island begins to form him as something new. “He was the bean, caught in the massive indestructible flesh of Speranza (the name Robinson gave to the island).”⁹ Robinson liberates pure elements, pure images, without resemblance.¹⁰

But at this point, just as Robinson was about to descend into this abyss, no longer schizoid, no longer perverse, just simply other, perhaps mad, Friday appears. With Friday appearing, Robinson experiences Deleuze’s third moment of the Other. Suddenly the presence of another brings the structures of the world, old and new, newly discovered and possibilities not yet explored, back into focus, back into question. The other as possible world has unsettled the continuity of the experiential world. The world in Robinson’s mind goes through an explosion of possibilities and intersections. The only way for Robinson to come to terms with such complexity, is to navigate the diverse courses of possibility: in other words to accept the ways of perversion – to question what is true or right, to make space for one’s own desires to develop, to work them into the world of others.

The series the-Other-as-Structure, the-Other-as-pure-images-without-resemblance and the-Other-as-diversity, becomes a critical framework not only to review the world but also to create the world. For us to access such empirical insights, Deleuze’s indirect suggestion is that we may have to shipwreck ourselves from the general cultural currents. However, the question remains whether this serial solipsism is sufficient as a theory of creativity?

Returning to Benjamin’s question posed at the start, “Whether the relationship of the storyteller to his material, human life, is not in itself a craftsman’s relationship, whether it is not his very task to fashion the raw material of experience, his own and that of others, in a solid, useful, and unique way.”

For Deleuze, the Other is perilously close to being simply other self and the world as this other self might see it. This would drive own experience and other experience more or less to be the same experience. A story needs more than one characterisation of the world. Every story needs the extra complexity brought to the world by Friday, and with

⁹ Tournier, *Friday*, Op.cit. 105, quoted in Deleuze, 314.

¹⁰ Ibid.319.

the full diversionary potential at the particular moment he brings it. Tournier's book was called Friday. It was not just about Robinson.